

**REMARKS PREPARED FOR
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NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
FOR THE
TRAFFIC RECORDS FORUM
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Slide # 1 Black Slide

Thank you, Alan for that introduction.

[Alan McMillan, President of the National Safety Council]

This is the 2nd time that I have attended this annual conference. At the conference in Denver, you might remember that I noted my surprise at being the 1st NHTSA Administrator to address a group whose function is so vital to everything we do.

Sadly, however, this is the last time I will meet with you as NHTSA Administrator. As you may have heard, it is with mixed emotions that I am stepping aside at the end of this month to assume the position of Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Homeland Security.

However, nothing will deter me from the task at hand until that time.

You in this room are the people who are invested in improving highway safety data. I can't imagine a better audience that is more appropriate than you to announce the 2004 Fatality Analysis Reporting System's Annual Assessment. Gathering, compiling and analyzing such a large amount of traffic data in such a short time period is truly an accomplishment in and of itself.

Slide # 2 2004 Motor Vehicle Fatalities

I am proud to announce that for the 2nd straight year highway fatalities decreased. We saved 248 people from death on our highways in 2004. In fact, 578 passenger vehicle occupants were saved than the year before.

This means hundreds of families were not torn apart by the grief and suffering that accompanies the tragic loss of loved ones in motor vehicle crashes.

Last year, we reversed the growing trend in motor vehicle fatalities for the first time in 6 years. This year we built on that turnaround and continued the reduction in motor vehicle fatalities.

Congratulations for being a part of this important accomplishment.

[Recognize Federal and State Data officials who worked on the gathering and release of 2004 final FARS numbers. Ask them to stand]

Slide # 3 Traffic Fatality Rate

This fatality reduction occurred in the face of 30 billion more vehicle miles traveled the traffic fatality rate in 2004 to 1.46 deaths per 100 million miles traveled -- a record low since record keeping began 30 years ago, and well below the rate of four years ago when we began an intense focus on our five priorities.

Slide # 4 Alcohol-related fatalities

It is also clear that our *You Drink & Drive. You Lose* high visibility enforcement strategy is working. Alcohol-related fatalities decreased for the 2nd straight year. 411 fewer people were killed in alcohol-related crashes than the prior years.

Moreover, deaths in crashes involving a driver or pedestrian with a blood alcohol over the legal limit of .08 also decreased for a 2nd year in a row by 269 people.

This yardstick is important because the high BAC driver is the lion's share of the problem. This population has a problem with alcohol and needs court intervention and treatment. Our comprehensive approach to impaired driving is working, but the program is still too slow.

Slide # 5 Motor Vehicle Fatalities

Increasing safety belt use was major factor in today's announcement. In 2004, safety belt use reached 80% - a record high. It is no coincidence that 578 fewer passenger vehicle occupants were killed in the year of record belt use.

Unfortunately, this good news is tempered by the continued increase in motorcycle fatalities, which rose 7.9% to 4,008.

Over the past 8 years motorcycle fatalities have increased by more than 85% and has surpassed the 4,000-fatality mark for the first time since 1987.

Increasing ridership and the continuing repeal of state helmet laws are at the root of this growth in motorcycle fatalities, both at which are beyond the control and influence of NHTSA. This

responsibility lies squarely with the states and with law enforcement, to provide for and enforce helmet laws, speed enforcement and impaired riding enforcement.

Slide # 6 Black Slide

While we can be pleased with the decrease in overall motor vehicle fatalities, we will never call 42,000 fatalities as a victory. So our purpose remains – to continue to reduce death and injury on our nation's roads and highways.

The announcement of the 2004 Annual FARS results is the strongest evidence that everything we do, every policy decision we make is based on current and reliable data. Without it, we would not know the scope of any problem, whether we are successful at reducing the problem, or identifying emerging issues. We could not communicate accurately to the public about their risk—and their responsibility to address the problem.

WALK THE TALK ON DATA

To back-up my claim about the importance of data, I made a promise to this group that every level and every branch of

government would know where the Administration and the Department of Transportation stands on the importance of traffic safety data.

Today, the progress made on behalf of that promise has been extensive and remarkable. I am proud to say that when it comes to data we walk the talk.

Following the Denver conference, we created the Data Integrated Project Team in September 2003. It was tasked with making recommendations to me for improving traffic safety data. The Team issued its report in July 2004.

A key recommendation was to create a Federal Traffic Records Coordinating Committee (DOTTRCC). The committee was formed in October of 2004, and includes representation from NHTSA, FHWA, FMCSA, the newly formed Research and Innovative Technologies Agency and the Secretary's office.

To give form and structure to this Committee a formal Charter including a Vision and Goal statement was adopted. Tomorrow, Associate Administrator Joe Carra will discuss this with you in depth at the Federal Agency Update Session.

Slide # 7 dottrcc.gov

We are all aware that funding for traffic safety data is critical to its improvement. Unfortunately, many states and organizations are unaware of the variety of DOT funding sources available and how to access them. To solve this problem, the committee compiled a comprehensive listing of all sources at their new website, dottrcc.gov.

This new site, acting as a clearinghouse of the Committee's activities, will raise awareness and provide the states with an important link to improve their data systems. The listing of Federal Data Sources is the first of many aids to be provided.

To insure that the entire Federal government was on the same page, the report recommended and the committee developed a policy statement on the importance of traffic safety data.

This is the first time that the Department has come together with the common view of the importance of traffic safety data.

By declaring “high quality data shall be used to support DOT programs” at all level of government, we send a strong message that the Department of Transportation is committed to collecting high quality data and that these data will be used to drive our policies and programs.

This past Friday, Congress finally passed SAFETEA. The bill includes a provision similar to the Administration’s proposal with more than \$34 million annually for the next 4 years to help States improve their data collection efforts.

The newly created section – 408 – provides a dedicated stream of funding to improve your State’s Traffic Records Systems. [Let’s hear it!]

Under the Administration’s request the first year grant is for at least \$300,000, and the succeeding-year grant will be at least \$500,000. This increases the size of first year grants, in some cases, more than 11-fold.

The grants are a matching program with the 80% Federal share to match the states 20%, and like the 411 grants they may only be used to improve traffic safety data. Keep in mind that many other

programs were consolidated and made more flexible. Not 408. We wanted to make absolutely sure that grounded highway safety plans were possible using the best possible data.

Two years ago, I said this administration was going to make traffic safety data a priority. From requesting increased funding to improving federal data coordination, I am proud to say we have kept our word.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE STATES

Our diligent work at the Federal level will indeed help us at the U.S. Department of Transportation to improve and better coordinate our data systems.

This accomplishment doesn't stop there. It will help everybody involved in data collection – from your planners, to your engineers, the medical community, law enforcement and your other partners.

For instance, States will especially benefit because it will allow them to better identify trends such as underage drinking, or crash victims using occupant protection, or specific geographic locations

showing an increase in crashes. This will allow local communities to target countermeasures more effectively and quickly.

Already many of your States have Traffic Records Coordinating Committees in place; however, we need them to be functional and empowered. It is important that your State committees have the support of your State's political leadership, which will signal that data collection is essential to the decision making process.

There hasn't been a better time to focus on your State's committees. With better federal data coordination in place and Section 408 funding around the corner, make sure your State's committee is in the best position to take advantage of these advancements.

To help you prepare for this, I have personally asked each of our 10 Regional Administrators to work closely with the States so that they all have effective committees in place.

I have also asked that Federal Highway Administration and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Division Directors join with us to provide technical assistance in the development and implementation of your data improvement programs.

VALUE OF DATA TO THE STATES

Because data are the backbone of research, problem identification, program management and evaluation, the value of improved data systems for the States is unquestionable.

The safety challenge calls for personal commitment to action by the Leadership of all State agencies involved in improving highway safety. Please, call upon the political leadership at the Department if you need our help in communicating your importance and your critical role, to your state political leadership.

CHALLENGE TO STATES

We, in this room, collectively represent the highway safety data community. So I would like to issue a challenge to each and every person here today -- make sure that your state develops a strategic highway safety plan, one which includes data improvements.

We expect all 50 States, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories adopt a data-driven strategic highway safety plan. The improvement to our data collection systems would offer

unparalleled opportunities to identify, respond to and communicate with each other about every kind of motor vehicle crash, to implement effective prevention countermeasures in infrastructure, vehicle factors, and human factors, and to improve our incident management and response.

This is the type of advancement that is necessary if we are going to make a serious reduction in the number of overall motor vehicle deaths.

We at the U.S. Department of Transportation are committed to assisting you in the development and implementation of your comprehensive highway safety plans.

The Federal government is providing a financial incentive to fulfill this challenge, but I want to appeal to your higher sense of obligation. Getting those numbers down will not happen without you.

You need to convey in no uncertain timing a sense of urgency for action to improve our States' traffic safety data systems if we are to make genuine and sustained progress in reducing the death toll on our highways. Good intentions are not enough.

That's your challenge.

I want to thank each and every one of you for being the unsung heroes, often laboring anonymously behind any success we at NHTSA might enjoy.

Success does not happen without a plan. Plans don't happen without effective strategic planning, and you can't make a plan without intelligence. You are NHTSA's intel community, so crucial to what we do.

I am proud to be able to share this good news with you this morning—before it gets to press—to show you the fruits of your labors.

I will miss you greatly.